

# Australasian Federation.

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**D**URING the last four years the most gifted, the most intellectual and the most trusted public men in Australia have been patiently, yet persistently, striving to evolve a scheme that would weld the colonies into one harmonious nation. Their labours have been happily crowned by the production of a constitution, containing all those liberal enactments which characterise "that great and glorious fabric, the best monument of human wisdom—the British Constitution." Moreover, the framers of the constitution, alive to the vigour and vitality of popular and democratic government throughout the Australasian Colonies, have conceded to the citizens of the embryo Commonwealth a power and control over their representatives and destinies, greater and more potent than has been conceded by any other instrument of government.

While conventions have been held, and the public of Australia educated by the lucid exposition of her leaders of opinion, our New Zealand statesmen have looked on with an apathetic indifference, and even at the last hour, on the eve of the nation's birth, despite the loudly voiced popular demand for information, they confess their ignorance and are reluctant to discuss this momentous question. The attitude of our representatives in Parliament shows how crude is the political thought, how narrow the mental vision, and how clouded the foresight of politicians, whose single idea of political wisdom is to advocate the claims of their own particular districts, regardless of the welfare of the colony. Yet the occasional utterances of our public men show that the advantages of union with the Commonwealth are conceded with respect to Judicature, Trade and Defence.

Sir Robert Stout suggested, some time ago, that a treaty might be made with the Commonwealth, empowering New Zealand

to avail herself of the appellate jurisdiction of the Federal High Court, and, thereby, avoid the inordinate expense of appeals to the Privy Council.

The Right Hon. Mr. Seddon, the Hon. J. G. Ward and others, think the diminution, or almost complete extinction of our trade with Australia, can be obviated by a Reciprocity Treaty with the Commonwealth—an idea that is ridiculed by the politicians and commercial men in the Australian colonies.

The Hon. Edmund Barton points out how vain is any hope to secure reciprocity by stating that "Reciprocity between two populations of which one would amount to nearly four millions, and the other 800,000, would be somewhat too unequal to be described by that name. Equal trade relations with all parts of the Federal Commonwealth, are accompanied by equality in various other matters, such, for instance, as defence by sea and land. The reciprocity, at which Mr. Seddon hints, would have none of these accompaniments, and it is but natural to expect that, on that account, it would not be accepted without hesitation by a Commonwealth of which New Zealand was not a member." The greater productiveness of New Zealand soil enables the farmers to raise agricultural produce at a much cheaper rate than in Australia, and it is unreasonable to expect that the Australian farmers will allow the price of their produce to be lowered by the unequal competition of New Zealand.

The view, too, that New Zealand should unite with Australia in propounding a scheme of defence, has also been frequently expressed of late inside and outside of the House of Parliament. In a word, our statesmen recognise many of the advantages that Federation would confer on New Zealand, but think they can secure them without undertaking any of its burdens.